DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 752 FL 019 263

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TITLE Lexicalization in Translation: An Empirical Study of Students' Progress.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the First Language International Conference (Elsinore, Denmark, May 31-June 2, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Hebrew; Instructional Effectiveness; *Interlanguage; *Interpretive Skills; *Problem Solving; Skill Development; *Translation; Uncommonly Taught Languages; *Vocabulary

ABSTRACT

A study conducted as part of a year-long Hebrew-English translation workshop in Israel focused on the development of students' ability to deal with cases in which the unmarked equivalent of a source-language string was a single lexical item. Subjects were 8 native English-speaking students, 8 native Hebrew-speaking students, and 12 professional translators, all native English-speakers. At the workshops' beginning, the subjects were presented with a Hebrew text incorporating 10 strings for which the unmarked English equivalent was a single word. Verbosity in translating and selection of single-word equivalents were then discussed, and subjects were asked to translate the passage into English. At year's end, the subjects were asked to translate a Hebrew text in which there were 18 Hebrew strings for which the unmarked English equivalent was a lexicalized form. The professional translators had taken part in the initial discussion but had not been exposed to any of the pedagogy during the year. Analysis of the results indicates that an overall increase in lexicalization occurred for all three subject groups for both low- and high-frequency equivalents, but the change was nonsignificant. Verbosity was lowest among professionals; reduction of verbosity was greatest among the native English-speakers. (MSE)

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# LEXICALIZATION IN TRANSLATION:

# AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF STUDENTS' PROGRESS

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INTRODUCTION

What follows started out as an attempt to show a systematic progression towards eliminating a typical "translation problem" in the work of aspiring students in a translation workshop (from Hebrew into English.) The progression was to take the following neatly charted course:

1. Identify the "problem" and point it out to the students;
2. Conduct an experiment designed to prove to the students that they "suffer" from the "problem";
3. Discuss the etiology of the "problem" with the students and prescribe ways of reducing (and ultimately eliminating) it;
4. Engage in ongoing consciousness-raising by making specific reference to the "problem" whenever it arises in students' work;
5. Towards the end of the workshop, repeat the experiment conducted in (2) above (using different materials) and behold the disappearance of said "problem";
6. Proceed to tackle the next "problem".

All too often, problems in students' translations are dealt with as they happen to arise in the texts being tackled. Attempts at systematic categorization, definition or resolution of specific ones as recurrent or typical tend to be confined to interlingual differences drawn from contrastive linguistics, with far less attention

to those which characterize translation as such. If the raison d'etre of translation workshops is to turn out people more aware of, and more competent to deal with the pitfalls of translation (both in principle and with respect to a given language pair), the approach outlined above - or at least so I reasoned - should be right on target. So much for purposeful methodology: what started out to be a vindication of translation-workshop didactics turned into a sobering lesson in the pervasiveness of "translationese" - as interlanguage is often referred to in connection with translation.

Interlanguage (Selinker 1972), usually associated with foreign-language learning, is often subsumed under error analysis. It results from the transfer (interference) of structural patterns at all levels of the linguistic hierarchy from one language into another. Far from being confined to the language learner (for whom it is ideally but a passing - albeit prolonged - stage), interlanguage is also characteristic of translation:

> Translation in favorable conditions, between two languages that the translator is a competent speaker of, or even translation into his own mother tongue, also abounds in manifestations of interlanguage ... I would claim that the occurrence of interlanguage forms in translation follows from the very definition of this type of activity/product, thus

being a formal "translation universal" (Toury 1979).

THE PROBLEM

One of the most prominent features of interlanguage among learners is verbosity: "Of two L2 structures learners will prefer the wordier, the more verbose..." (Levenston 1971). More recently, research into pragmalinguistic behavior has also taken verbosity as one of its key parameters. It is seen as a strategy of communication (Weizman 1986) and is cited as one of the factors which may account for pragmatic failure (Thomas 1983).

Like interlanguage in general, so too verbosity is no less relevant to translation than to language learning. One of the salient features of translations qua translations is excess verbiage - with or without redundant information - caused in part by failure to lexicalize a concept which can only be expressed by several words (a string) in the source langauge and is represented as such in the source-language inventory.

The translator's failure to lexicalize may well arise from the fact that s/he will intuitively resolve for "that one of the possible solutions which promises a maximum of effect with a minimum of effort" (Levy 1967). Seeing the paraphrastic (or periphrastic)

formulation in the source text, the translator reproduces each of its components, oblivious to the existence of a one-word equivalent in the target language. In some instances this may of course be a deliberate choice dictated by the underlying concept of equivalence. The present study excludes such cases: it is confined to those in which the "problem" incurred by failure to lexicalize is indeed a problem in relation to the norms brought to bear on the given text or text-type. The texts dealt with in this study - and in the translation workshop in which it was conducted - were non-literary, and the prevailing norm was acceptability-oriented. The study focused on cases in which the unmarked equivalent of a source-language string was in fact a single lexical item.

## METHOD

### Subjects:

The study was conducted as part of a year-long translation workshop. There were three groups of subjects: eight native speakers of English (referred to below as the L1 group); eight native speakers of Hebrew (referred to below as the L2 group); and twelve professional translators, all of them native speakers of English. The third group was not part of the workshop.

Apparatus and procedure:

Subjects were first presented with a Hebrew text incorporating ten strings for which the unmarked English equivalent would be a single word: six of these equivalents were high-frequency words; four were low-frequency. (Though use of definitive frequency/distribution lists would provide a less equivocal basis, the present study made do with intuitive judgements (Crystal and Davy 1969: 91, ft. 8).)

The task consisted of translating the text into English. Subjects had recourse to as much time and reference material as they required. They were to hand in one copy of their translation, which would then serve as the baseline. A duplicate copy was used as the basis for class discussion. This began with disclosure of the rationale for the exercise, and dealt with verbosity in translation in general and with failure to lexicalize in particular. Emphasis was placed on the importance of making recourse to a one-word equivalent when available, especially if unmarked. The notion of word-frequency was pointed out, since it presumably correlates with the likelihood of retrieval in the translation process.
Distinctions were noted between specialized and nonspecialized vocabulary; students speculated that spontaneous retrieval of the unmarked lexical equivalent would occur more readily in the case of commonly used, nonspecialized words.

Throughout the year, a deliberate effort was made to reinforce the points made in the initial discussion. Students were assigned both intra- and interlingual exercises in the form of isolated sentences in which strings were to be replaced by paradigmatic one-word equivalents. In addition, since target-language lexicalization of source-language strings figures in virtually any translation, the texts used throughout the workshop afforded ample opportunity to make recurrent reference to the problem and to recall the points made in the stages described above. It was assumed that repeated emphasis on the need to seek and make recourse to lexicalized equivalents would reduce the incidence this type of verbosity.

Towards the end of the year, subjects were again given a Hebrew text (somewhat longer than the first), including eighteen strings of Hebrew wordsfor which the unmarked English equivalent was a lexicalized form: ten high-frequency and eight low-frequency words. This time, the subjects were aware of the rationale. The same text was assigned to the twelve professional translators, who had taken part in the initial discussion but had not been exposed to any corrective pedagogy.

RESULTS

Text 1

| | Lexicalizations of high-frequency words (n=6) | Lexicalizations of low-frequency words (n=4) |
|---|---|---|
| L2 students (n=8) | 29 (60.41%) | 15 (46.85%) |
| L1 students (n=8) | 35 (72.91%) | 22 (68.75%) |
| Professionals (n=12) | 63 (87.50%) | 37 (77.08%) |

Text 2

| | lexicalizations of high-frequency words (n=10) | lexicalizations of low-frequency words (n=8) |
|---|---|---|
| L2 students (n=8) | 57 (71.25%) | 45 (70.31%) |
| L1 students (n=8) | 69 (86.25%) | 57 (89.06%) |
| Professionals (n=12) | 111 (92.50%) | 88 (91.66%) |

DISCUSSION

It is evident from the results that an overall increase in lexicalization occurred in the work of all three groups both for high-frequency and for low-frequency equivalents. However, a chi-squared test revealed that the differences between text 1 and

text 2 for both high- and low-frequency equivalents were nonsignificant in all cases.

Lexicalization was more likely to occur in the case of words with a high distribution in the target language (nonspecialized, "common-core" words), though the difference between the two categories was smaller in the case of native speakers of the target language (the L1 students and the professionals). The most marked improvement for both categories of equivalents occurred in the case of the L1 students.

As expected, the type of verbosity being studied here was lowest among the professional translators. This differential was less marked in the second text; i.e., reduction of verbosity in the case of this group - which was not exposed to corrective pedagogy other than a single discussion of the rationale of the study (after having translated the first text) - was least significant.

While the reduction of verbosity was greater among the translation students (particular the L1 group), their work too clearly attests to the limited effect of corrective pedagogical practice (suggested in connection with pragmalinguistic skills as well (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1986; Edmondson and House: 1989)). Thus, the pervasiveness of interlanguage, manifested here as failure-to-lexicalize, is borne out by the performance of all three groups.

Replication of the present study with the same as well as other language pairs may prove enlightening. Further research might also include the following:

1. manipulation of what appear to be the two key variables:
   - frequency of the one-word equivalent in the target-language, and
   - directionality;
2. a comparable study of interpretation;
3. comparable studies centering on other manifestations of "translationese".

## CONCLUSION

What began as a blithe attempt to prove the effectiveness of a purposeful methodology in eradicating a feature of interlanguage wound up as a humbling lesson in its pervasiveness. Still, as the findings indicate, the feature of translationese under review in the present study was in fact reduced across the board: for both specialized and nonspecialized vocabulary, and for both L1-L2 and L2-L1 directionality. In other words, though corrective pedagogy may fall short of universal success, persistent and concerted efforts at heightening students' (and professionals') awareness of a specific type of interference will play a role in reducing it.

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